

Israel and Gaza Deserve Better than a Misguided Resolution

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First, why are we bringing this resolution to the floor without ever giving former South African Constitutional Court Justice Richard Goldstone a hearing to explain his findings? Have those who will vote on H.Res. 867 actually read the resolution? Have they read the Goldstone report? Are they aware that Justice Goldstone has issued a paragraph by paragraph response, available on my Web site at www.baird.house.gov, to H.Res. 867 pointing out that many of its assertions are factually inaccurate or deeply misleading?

Since scarcely a dozen House Members have actually been to Gaza, what actual first-hand knowledge do the rest of the Members of Congress possess on which to base their judgment of the merits of H.Res. 867 or the Goldstone report?

What will it say about this Congress and our country if we so readily seek to block "any further consideration" of a human rights investigation produced by one of the most respected jurists in the world today, a man who led the investigations of abuses in South Africa, the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Kosovo and worked to identify and prosecute Nazi war criminals as a member of the Panel of the Commission of Enquiry into the Activities of Nazism in Argentina?

As one of the first two American officials, along with Rep. Keith Ellison (D-Minn.), to enter Gaza shortly after the conclusion of major bombing from "Operation Cast Lead," then again several months later, I have seen firsthand the devastating destruction of hospitals, schools, homes, industries and infrastructure. Much of that devastation was wrought using U.S. manufactured and paid for weaponry. I have also spoken with health workers, average Gazans, NGO relief workers and many others.

In addition, I have been to the Israeli town of Sderot, which has been the target of repeated rocket attacks, and to a number of Palestinian towns and Israel settlements in the West bank. Colleagues who have not been to the region may wish to view some of the images and

interviews from these visits on my Web site.

With the information from these personal visits and on the ground knowledge, I read with care and interest the Goldstone report in its entirety and my firm conclusion is that, although the findings may be unpleasant and troubling, they are, unfortunately, consistent with the facts and evidence. In my judgment, far from meriting the obstruction called for in H.Res. 867, the Goldstone report is without question worthy of further investigation.

I know this conclusion is not easily accepted and I know it raises serious charges against entities and individuals on both sides of this conflict, Israel and Hamas. But if our own country is truly to stand for human rights and the rule of law, and if facts matter, how can we do other than insist that legitimate questions and evidence are followed by further investigation and, if necessary and warranted, appropriate consequences?

H.Res. 867 is very serious business. If, as Goldstone asserts and the evidence I have seen supports, there were in fact gross violations of international law and human rights on all sides, we cannot in good conscience support H.Res. 867.

This is about much more than just another imposed political litmus test that we are all too often asked to perform. This is about whether we as individuals and this Congress as an institution find it acceptable to drop white phosphorous on civilian targets, to rocket civilian communities, to destroy hospitals and schools, to use civilians as human shields, to deliberately destroy non-military factories, industries and basic water, electrical and sanitation infrastructure. This is about whether it is acceptable to restrict the movement, opportunities and hopes of more than a million people every single day.

At the end of the day, this is also about our own domestic security. If we are seen internationally as condoning violations of human rights and international law, if our money and our weaponry play a leading role in those violations, and if we reflexively obstruct the findings of someone with the credentials, history and integrity of Justice Goldstone, it can only diminish our international standing and our own security.

Rep. Brian Baird (D) represents Washington's 3rd district.

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